

ABSTRACT

THESIS: Fallback Strategy and Tool Use: Floristic Composition in the Caatinga Forest and Cerrado and its Impact on Diet and Tool-Using Behavior of Capuchin Monkeys

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DEGREE: Master of Arts

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DATE: May, 2014

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This study examines the effect fallback foods, foods eaten when other, more preferred foods are scarce, have on the tool-using behaviors of capuchin monkeys. In the arid Serra da Capivara National Park in Brazil, black-striped capuchins (*Cebus libidinosus*) use stone tools to dig for underground tubers, a very rare behavior among primates. I test the hypothesis that the capuchins in the Serra da Capivara exploit tubers as a fallback food because palm nuts, an important fallback resource to other groups of capuchins living in arid environments, are either rare or absent there. Studies of floristic analysis at the park and other capuchin sites show that palm nut species recorded to be consumed by capuchins are not found at the Serra da Capivara. Additionally, nutritional analysis of both palm nuts and tubers suggest that tubers could act as a replacement for palm nuts as a fallback food. This may have relevance to human evolution, as several researchers suggest tubers and other underground storage organs were important resources to early hominins.